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RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT:

C.P. TIELE'S PARADIGM OF SCIENCE OF RELIGION¹

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Arie L. Molendijk

Briefly, the development of religion is the necessary consummation of all human development, and is at once demanded and promoted by it. (Tiele)

The notion of 'development' pervaded the nineteenth-century study of religion. Max Müller lectured extensively on the 'origin and growth of religion',² Edward B. Tylor undertook 'researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art, and custom', as the subtitle of *Primitive Culture* states,³ and Cornelis Petrus Tiele treated the 'hypothesis of development' in some detail. This paper will focus on Tiele and show how the idea of development functioned in his work, actually forming the foundation of his science of religion. No doubt other students of religion at the time were also deeply steeped in thinking in terms of religious development as well, but Tiele made an enormous effort to clarify the importance of the 'hypothesis of development' for the study of religion. Before turning to Tiele, however, I will make some general remarks on the use of the concept of religious development in the nineteenth century (I). Secondly, I will outline Tiele's basic assumptions, paying special attention to his, at that time, famous article of 1874 on the laws of development (II). Thirdly, I will scrutinize the first series of the Gifford Lectures which epitomize his later views on religious development (III), and finally, I will draw some conclusions (IV).⁴

¹ I would like to thank my colleagues Jan N. Bremmer and Hetty Zock and the anonymous reviewer of *Numen* for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

² F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Origin and the Growth of Religion. As Illustrated by the Religions of India*, London 1878.

³ E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture. Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (1871), 2 vols, third edition, London 1891.

⁴ For an analysis of the second series of the Gifford Lectures, cf. Arie L. Molendijk, 'Tiele on Religion', in *Numen* 46 (1999) 237-268.

I. Some Remarks on ‘Development’ in Nineteenth-Century Thought

Besides Tiele, the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) was an extremely influential representative of evolutionist thinking in the nineteenth century. His line of research has been described as follows:

Tylor’s central anthropological problem, in its simplest terms, was to ‘fill the gap between Brixham Cave and European Civilization without introducing the hand of God’ – that is, to show that human culture was, or might have been, the product of a natural evolutionary development.⁵

The discovery of Brixham Cave had established the great antiquity of man and demonstrated that the biblical chronology was untenable. For Tylor, this meant that the investigation of human history had to be conducted along the lines of the ‘sciences of inorganic nature’: ‘[O]ur thoughts, wills, and actions accord with laws as definite as those which govern the motion of waves, the combination of acids and bases, and the growth of plants and animals’.⁶ Part of the debate concerned the question of what kind of ‘laws’ were involved in the process of the development of human culture. Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900)⁷ was also involved in this enterprise. In a sentence which shows an almost boyish excitement in digging for the treasures of ancient times, Müller warned that his position was different from that of G.W.F. Hegel or Auguste Comte:

There is to my mind no subject more absorbing than the tracing of the origin and first growth of human thought; – not theoretically, or in accordance with the Hegelian laws of thought, or the Comtian epochs; but historically, and like an Indian trapper, spying for every footprint, every layer, every broken blade that might tell and testify of the former presence of man in his early wanderings and searchings after light and truth’.⁸

Comment [JCH1]: Arie, je moet deze citaat goed checken. Ik mis ‘of’ in de eerste zin, en ben niet zeker van ‘testify of’ later. Ik durf het niet te verbeteren in ‘testify to’ omdat het een citaat is.

⁵ George W. Stocking, ‘On the Limits of “Presentism” and “Historicism” in the Historiography of the Behavioral Sciences’ (1965), in Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, New York – London 1968, pp. 1-12, esp. p. 11; cf. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York etc. 1987, 69-74.

⁶ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. I, p. 2.

⁷ Lourens P. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller. A Life Devoted to the Humanities*, Leiden 2001.

⁸ Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. I: *Essays on the Science of Religion*, second

This last formulation betrays the practical dimension of much evolutionary thought. Both Tiele and Müller hoped that the newly established science of religion would help to bring about a purer and more advanced form of religion. This ideal is often criticized by modern scholars, who want the science of religion to be a ‘fully secular, fully neutral discipline’.⁹ However, it should be borne in mind that most research at the time – also by those who were critical of Christianity – was not disinterested. Tylor, for one, claimed that ethnography was, in the end, ‘a reformer’s science’, which contributed to the ‘advancement of civilization’. It may be painful ‘to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction’. Yet this work had to be done ‘for the good of mankind’.¹⁰ The doctrine of development involved a new, progressive view of history which differed fundamentally, for instance, from that of David Hume. The author of *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) thought that the chief use of history was to discover the ‘constant and universal principles of human nature’: ‘Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular’.¹¹ The notion of progressive development (including new stages) has its roots in German Idealism – Nietzsche even declared it to be a typical German invention.¹² According to this line of thought, the development of the human species was gradually disconnected from that of nature.¹³ In Britain, however, the idea that human history is part and parcel of natural history was not so readily given up, as is evident from the work of men like Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and Tylor. Despite these differences, in all cases scholars held the notion that species or stages of

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edition, London 1868, p. ix.

⁹ Jan G. Platvoet, ‘Hawk Says/Osansa se: *Ade a Onyame aye nhina ye*; an Observer’s View of the Development of the Study of Religion in South Africa’ (paper presented at ASRSA Congress, Swaziland, 28-30 June 1993), p. 13f.; quoted in Abdulkader I. Tayob, ‘Modern South Africa and the Science of Religion: Productive and Inhibitive Models for the Study of Religions’, in Gerard A. Wiegiers & Jan G. Platvoet, eds. *Modern Societies & the Science of Religions*, Leiden etc. 2002, pp. 302-328, here p. 322.

¹⁰ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. II, p. 453 (first edition, p. 410).

¹¹ David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Repr. 1777 edition, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, third edition revised by P.H. Nidditch, Oxford 1975 (etc.), VII.i.65 (p. 83).

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Aph. 357 (Schlechta edition, vol. II, p. 226).

¹³ K. Weyland, ‘Entwicklung I’, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (ed. J. Ritter), vol. II, Darmstadt 1972, col. 550-557. Here is not the place to sketch the history of the idea of development in European intellectual history, which would have to include French scholars as well. For the emancipation of the scholarly study of history from the philosophy of history in the nineteenth century, see Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany, 1831-1993*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 33-65.

society develop out of earlier forms.

The variety of concepts and theories of development in the nineteenth century was immense and I will not attempt to present an overview, let alone give a synthesis. However, one term must be addressed and that is 'evolutionism'. In this context it does not refer to Darwin and his followers, but to a theory of culture, which claims a unilinear, universal development from a 'barbaric' or 'savage' stage, to a 'civilized' form of human coexistence. In more developed civilizations, 'survivals'¹⁴ from older stages may exist, but principally the course of history is progressive. One of the most famous schemes of evolution is given by Lewis Henry Morgan, who proposed the three stages of 'savagery', 'barbarism' and 'civilisation' in his classic study *Ancient Society* (1877).¹⁵ Evolutionism was a social theory with wide ramifications and, according to one's point of view and interests, various representatives can be distinguished. In his stimulating book on the Victorian era, J.W. Burrow focuses on Sir Henry Main, Herbert Spencer and Tylor and also devotes some attention to theorists such as J.F. McLennan and Sir John Lubbock.¹⁶ In so doing, he does not deny the importance of continental scholars, such as Wilhelm Wundt, A. Bastian and A. Waitz. On the contrary, Burrow sees evolutionary theory in Victorian England as the outcome of a

. . . tension between English positivistic attitudes to science on the one hand and, on the other, a more profound reading of history, coming to a large extent from German romanticism, which made the older form of positivist social theory . . . seem inadequate.¹⁷

Evolutionism was dominant in early ethnology or, as it is now called, cultural anthropology. Tylor and James George Frazer are often mentioned as its main late

¹⁴ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. I, p. 16 (first edition, p. 15); cf. Kippenberg, 'Survivals. Conceiving of Religious History in an Age of Development', in Arie L. Molendijk & Peter Pels, eds. *Religion in the Making. The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, Leiden 1998, pp. 297-312.

¹⁵ Cf. Gerhard Schlatter, 'Evolutionismus', in Hubert Cancik, et al., eds. *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. II, Stuttgart, etc.: Kohlhammer, 1990, pp. 385-393; W. Rudolph, 'Evolutionismus, kultureller', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (ed. J. Ritter), vol. II, Darmstadt 1972, col. 835-835; James Waller & Mary Edwardsen, 'Evolutionism', in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. V, New York 1986, pp. 214-218.

¹⁶ J.W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society. A Study in Victorian Social Theory*, Cambridge 1966, pp. xiii-xiv; cf. Peter J. Bowler, *Theories of Human Evolution. A Century of Debate, 1844-1944*, Oxford 1986.

¹⁷ Burrow, *Evolution*, p. xv. Behind German romanticism lurks German idealism, which helped to establish a whole new paradigm of thinking in terms of historical development.

nineteenth-century representatives. Developmental schemata such as ‘magic, religion, science’ informed much research. Functionalistic anthropology gradually replaced the old evolutionism, stressing the fact that ‘magic’, ‘religion’ and ‘science’ could exist at the same time in one and the same culture, which ultimately had to be understood in its own context.¹⁸

Evolutionist schemes did not necessarily imply that religion was a superseded stage in human development, but could also be applied within the field of religion, to demonstrate, for instance, that ‘primitive’ forms of religion, such as animism and fetishism, developed through various sorts of polytheism to the highest stage of monotheism. This view was not uncontested. Tylor’s pupil Andrew Lang (1844-1912) defended the thesis that a kind of theistic pre-animism was the earliest stage of religious development.¹⁹ In an undated letter, Lang wrote: ‘To put it shortly . . . most of the very backward races have a very much better God than many races a good deal higher in civilisation’.²⁰ This view – known by the German name *Urmonotheismus* – found its most adamant defender in the person of the devout Catholic scholar Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954).²¹ On the basis of this assumption, which accords better with the biblical narratives, a ‘degeneration’ must have taken place in a later phase of religious history. Most scholars at the time, however, did not accept the ‘degeneration hypothesis’, but had a more or less evolutionist view of religious history.²²

By 1900, historians had pointed to ‘the ubiquity of evolution’ in religious studies.²³ More often than not this was explained by reference to the influence of Charles Darwin. In 1909, Jane Harrison (1850-1929), the British specialist on ancient Greek religion, talked about ‘the creation by Darwinism of the scientific study of

¹⁸ Cf. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, esp. pp. 314-329.

¹⁹ On pre-animism and its proponent R.R. Marrett, see Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, Princeton – Oxford 2002, pp. 125-126. According to Marrett, Tylor’s concept of animism (‘belief in spiritual beings’) was too intellectual to capture the human sense of awe and power, which lies at the origin of religion.

²⁰ Quoted in Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion. A History*, second edition, London 1986, p. 63.

²¹ The Dutch ethnologist J.J. Fahrenfort wrote his dissertation about this subject and became involved in a polemic with Schmidt; cf. Fahrenfort, *Het hoogste wezen der primitieven. Studie over het ‘oermonotheïsme’ bij enkele der laagste volken*, Groningen – Den Haag 1927; *Wie der Urmonotheismus am Leben erhalten wird*, Groningen – Den Haag 1930; on the controversy with Schmidt see A.J.F. Köbben, ‘J.J. Fahrenfort (1885-1975). Schoolmaster and Scholar’, in Han Vermeulen & Jean Kommers, eds. *Tales from Academia. History of Anthropology in the Netherlands*, 2 vols, Saarbrücken 2002, vol. I, pp. 245-265.

²² For Tiele’s rejection of the ‘degeneration hypothesis’, see Tiele, *De plaats van de godsdiensten der natuurvölker in de godsdienstgeschiedenis* (Inaugural address 1873), Amsterdam 1873, pp. 8-11.

²³ Robert Ackerman, ‘J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists and the ‘Scientific’ Study of Religion’, in Molendijk & Pels, eds. *Religion in the Making*, pp. 129-158, at p. 137; cf. Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer. His Life and Work*, Cambridge 1987.

religions'.²⁴ The famous anthropologist R.R. Marrett (1866-1943) spoke in the same vein as Jane Harrison²⁵ and, indeed, the notion of religious development was apparently the basis of much comparative research. In 1912, the British scholar Joseph Estlin Carpenter (1844-1927), lecturer on Comparative Religion at Manchester College (Oxford), wrote that the whole study of the history of religion was 'firmly established' on the basis of the 'great idea' of evolution.²⁶ How influential this 'great idea' actually was within religious studies would be a fine topic for further research. One should, however, avoid referring simply to Darwin in this context, as recent scholarship has shown that Darwinism and the evolutionary theory of culture are clearly to be distinguished from each other.²⁷

In his still much used history of comparative religion, Eric Sharpe does not entirely avoid this kind of misrepresentation, as he claims that the establishment of the field is due to the evolutionary method. He writes the following:

Before 1859 the student of the religions of the world, although he might have ample motive for his study, and more than enough material on which to base his researches, had no self-evident method for dealing with that material; after 1869, thanks to developments of the intervening decade, he had the evolutionary method.²⁸

In a footnote, he added that although challenged in the 1920s, the doctrine of evolution continued to dominate studies of religion throughout the period between the wars. These are strong claims, the more so since the alleged evolutionary method is not spelled out in great detail. The fact that there was 'no further need for random and haphazard judgements' is not much of an explanation in this regard. Moreover, by

²⁴ Jane Harrison, 'The Influence of Darwinism on the Study of Religion', in A.C. Seward, ed., *Darwin and Modern Science*, Cambridge 1909, pp. 494-511, here p. 494 (quoted by Ackerman, 'Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists', p. 137); cf. Mary Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison*, Cambridge, MA, 2000; Annabel Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison*, Oxford 2002.

²⁵ Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, p. 48.

²⁶ J. Estlin Carpenter, *Comparative Religion*, London 1912, p. 33.

²⁷ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 325, summarizes the differences between Darwin and Evolutionary Anthropology: '[I]t provided reassurance that human life on earth was not governed by randomly motivated Darwinian processes, but had an overall progressive direction'; Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress. The Victorians and the Past*, London 1989, pp. 68-69, 193-195, shows that many theorists of social and religious evolution did not accept the materialistic implications of Darwinism and built some sort of teleology into their own theories. They could claim, as did Max Müller, that they had been 'evolutionist' long before the *Origin of Species* appeared in 1859.

²⁸ Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, p. 27.

means of a quotation, Sharpe suggests that one of the main goals is the search for regularities: ‘the Reign of Law invaded every field of thought’.²⁹ The further characterization of the new method as ‘scientific, critical, historical and comparative’ does not explain why it should be termed ‘evolutionary’.³⁰ Perhaps it is not so much a method that can be learned and practiced as a new way of looking at things. The claim for the importance of evolutionism in religious studies throughout the years between the wars should be critically examined. The Dutch evidence – as I will show in the final part of this paper – apparently does not corroborate this claim.

II. Basic Assumptions

During his entire career Cornelis Petrus Tiele (1830-1902) was preoccupied with the idea of religious development. One could say, with only slight exaggeration, that the development and refinement of this concept was his main concern. It was not just an important working tool, but the basic idea on which his science of religion was built. In his inaugural address of 1873, on the place of nature religions in the history of religion, he claimed that if the study of religion is to mature then it has to be conceived of as a developmental history (*ontwikkelingsgeschiedenis*).³¹ The relevance of nature religions depends primarily on their place in the general sequence of religious development. In his first monograph on the general history of religion, *Outlines of the History of Religion to the Spread of the Universal Religions*, Tiele maintained this principle. The explicit aim here was to outline a history of religion (in the singular) and not of religions:

It is the same history, but considered from a different point of view. The first lies hidden in the last, but its object is to show how that great psychological phenomenon which we call religion has developed among the different races

²⁹ Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, p. 27 (referring to James Hope Moulton, *Religions and Religion*, London 1911, p. 7).

³⁰ Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, p. 31.

³¹ Tiele, *De plaats van de godsdiensten der natuurvölker in de godsdienstgeschiedenis* (Inaugural Address on the occasion of the acceptance of the professorship of the Remonstrant Brotherhood, Leiden, February 13, 1873), Amsterdam 1873, p. 7. I will use the word ‘development’ and its derivatives to translate the Dutch word ‘*ontwikkeling*’; the term ‘evolution’ is only used when the Dutch original has ‘*evolutie*’, which to Dutch ears is strongly linked with the notion of Darwinian evolution.

and peoples of the world. By it we see that all religions, even those of highly civilised nations, have grown up from the same simple germs, and by it, again, we learn the causes why these germs have in some cases attained such a rich and admirable development, and in others scarcely grew at all.³²

In this way the essential unity of religion is presupposed, whereas differences can be explained by reference to various stages of development.

The germination metaphor suggests a biological model of development, which is conceived of as proceeding gradually. The same issue was already addressed in earlier texts, where Tiele focused on the problem of classification. A good example is his book *The Religion of Zarathustra* (1864), which, in the final chapter, aims to determine the place of Parsism in religious history. Contrary to Max Müller, Tiele did not want to categorize religions on the basis of linguistic evidence. He distinguished two types of classification: the genealogical type, which asks about the origin and mutual relationship between religions, and the morphological one, which looks at the nature and stage of development of a particular religion. Tiele was particularly interested in this last type, which made it possible to construe a scheme of the development of religion (in the singular). He claimed that the development of all religions is bound by the same fixed laws. There are four periods, which follow each other regularly and in the same order: the worship of nature, the mythological phase, the philosophical-dogmatic period, and, finally, the well-known triad of Buddhism, Christianity and 'Mohammedanism', 'which we could call the universalistic or world religions'.³³ This classification has a clear chronological dimension: no religion reaches the later phases without first passing through the earlier stages. We can be certain about this, because the most highly developed religions still show clear marks of having ascended gradually from the lowest stage.³⁴

In the *Outlines of the History of Religion*, Tiele wanted to give scholars and lay people a general survey which could 'serve as a kind of guide or travelling-book

³² Tiele, *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst tot aan de heerschappij der Wereldgodsdiensten*, Amsterdam 1876, p. ix. The English translation appeared a year later: Tiele, *Outlines of the History of Religion to the Spread of the Universal Religions*, London 1877, p. x. It should be noted that the original Dutch title has 'wereldgodsdiensten' (= 'world religions'). An equivalent used by Tiele is 'universalistische godsdiensten', which is best translated as 'universalistic religions'.

³³ Tiele, *De Godsdienst van Zarathustra van haar ontstaan in Baktrië tot den val van het Oud-Perzische Rijk*, Haarlem 1864, p. 275.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 271.

on their journey through the immense fairyland of human faith and hope'.³⁵ The short introduction informs the reader about the basics of Tiele's approach:

The history of religion is not content with describing special religions (*hierography*), or with relating their vicissitudes and metamorphoses (the history of religions); its aim is to show how religion, considered generally as the relation between man and the superhuman powers in which he believes, has developed in the course of ages among different nations and races, and, through these, in humanity at large.³⁶

Religion is essentially a 'universal human phenomenon'³⁷ and its various stages can be traced through the course of history. This does not imply a unilinear development in the sense that all religions 'were derived from one single prehistoric religion'. It is 'not improbable' that different families of religions sprang from different origins. Tiele thought this to be an issue for further research.

What was of major importance for Tiele here is:

that all changes and transformations in religions, whether they appear from a subjective point of view to indicate decay or progress, are the results of natural growth, and find in it their best explanation'.³⁸

Consequently, supernatural explanations were excluded in the science of religion. Tiele listed the various factors which influence the process of development:

The history of religion shows how this development is determined by the character of nations and races, as well as by the influence of the circumstances surrounding them, and of special individuals, and it exhibits the established laws by which this development is controlled.³⁹

³⁵ Tiele, *Outlines of the History of Religion* (1877), p. viii (this remark is not in the Dutch original).

³⁶ Ibid., p. 1f. (italics in the original). The Dutch original does not speak about race but about 'volkenfamiliën' ('families of peoples'). For a discussion of Tiele's definition of religion see Molendijk, 'Tiele on Religion'.

³⁷ Tiele, *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst* (1876), p. 8 (my translation), *Outlines of the History of Religion* (1877), p. 6.

³⁸ Tiele, *Outlines of the History of Religion* (1877), p. 2, *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst* (1876), p. 3.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 2 (I have slightly adapted the translation according to the Dutch original), *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst* (1876), p. 3.

On the one hand, Tiele allowed for ‘special individuals’ to influence the course of historical development, on the other, he wanted to establish ‘laws’ of religious development. The tension here cannot be overlooked.

A couple of years earlier, in 1874, Tiele had published a large article concerning this issue, which not only specified his view of religious development, but also the laws which governed it.⁴⁰ The article is divided into four parts: 1) the course of development, 2) conditions of development (general laws), 3) special laws of development, and 4) the general law of development. The *course* of development is what Tiele elsewhere called ‘the morphology of religion’. What does the structural development of religion look like? Tiele described the course of development explicitly in terms of expansion, from family to tribal to national and, finally, to world religion.⁴¹ Parallel to this, the forms and contents of religious thinking and inclination (*gezindheid*) develop, which again influence religious practice. Sacrifice, for instance, is no longer a way of manipulating the gods, but a way to appease and to thank God (‘thy will be done’). In sum, religion becomes more rational, superior and pure.⁴²

However, this is not a necessary development taking place as a matter of course. Certain *conditions* have to be fulfilled, and in this context, Tiele formulated two general laws of the development of religion. The first law says that the need for the development of religion occurs only in those cases where the advancement of ‘general education’ (civilization) takes place first. This so-called Law of the Unity of the Human Mind (or Spirit) claims that the advancement of civilization precedes and encourages the advancement of religion. For the liberal Protestant Tiele, it is evident

⁴⁰ Tiele, ‘Over de wetten der ontwikkeling van den godsdienst’, in *Theologisch Tijdschrift* 8 (1874) 225-262 (signed: March 1874); shortened French translation: ‘Les lois du développement religieux’, in *Revue politique et littéraire*, deuxième série 11 (1876) 154-159 (‘D’après M.[onsieur] C.P. Tiele’, translated by C. Vincens). On another occasion I hope to devote some pages to Tiele’s discussions with the theologian Jacobus Isaac Doedes (1817-1897), professor at the conservative theological faculty of the University of Utrecht, and the Jena theologian Otto Pfleiderer (1839-1908), who would become one of the leading German scholars in religion and philosophy, after his appointment at the University of Berlin in 1875. Pfleiderer attacked Tiele’s concept of development as such, whereas Doedes cast doubt on the historical character of the morphological type of development and accused Tiele of making unwarranted assumptions; cf. J.I. Doedes, *De toepassing van de ontwikkelingstheorie niet aanbevelen voor de Geschiedenis der Godsdiensten*, Utrecht 1874; Tiele, ‘De ontwikkelingsgeschiedenis van den godsdienst en de hypotheze waarvan zij uitgaat’, in *De Gids* 38/2 (1874) 421-450; J.I. Doedes, ‘Over de ontwikkelingshypotheze in verband met de geschiedenis der godsdiensten’, in *Stemmen voor Waarheid en Vrede* 11 (1874) 771-788; O. Pfleiderer, ‘Zur Frage nach Anfang und Entwicklung der Religion’, in *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie* 1 (1875) 65-116.

⁴¹ Tiele, ‘Over de wetten’, p. 227.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

that man needs unity and harmony in his spiritual life, and that there is no conflict between religion and civilization; between faith and knowledge.⁴³ This means, again, that education should not be considered to be detrimental to religion; on the contrary, it is a great aid to religious development. This whole idea of religious history as striving towards purification and developing into higher stages fits in all too well with contemporary liberal Protestantism, which located revelation not only in the Sacred Scriptures, but foremost in History itself.

Besides education, Tiele was greatly in favour of free trade and exchange between people and nations, as they can bring people into contact with higher civilizations and religions. This type of liberalism completely overlooks, of course, the power relations involved in the transfer of material and spiritual goods. Tiele represents a conservative and elitist form of liberalism, which was current at the time, and he probably had no doubt at all about the fact that *we* have to educate *them*, and *they* will be thankful to *us* for doing so. The history of Dutch religion and Protestantism in particular has proved men like Tiele wrong on this point. Orthodox Protestants did not want to be educated this way and were not thankful at all. At the end of the nineteenth century they even founded their own churches, which caused enormous trauma among leading Dutch protestants who were members of the Dutch Reformed Church or smaller liberal churches such as the Remonstrant Brotherhood to which Tiele belonged.⁴⁴

The second law – the Law of Balance – also shows Tiele's own preferences. According to this law, religious development is only possible if there is a good balance between authority and freedom. The 'historically given' must be taken as the 'starting point of the advancement'.⁴⁵ A necessary condition of development is the existence of a tradition, which has to be carefully guarded by a class of priests, ministers or theologians. This does not mean, Tiele added, that there is no room for free-thinkers and the free preaching of the gospel. However, one should not underestimate the importance of an educated class of ministers and theologians, who protect us from falling into anarchy. Absolute democracy – Tiele explicitly denied the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 241f.

⁴⁴ Cf. Peter van Rooden, 'Secularization, Dechristianization and Rechristianization in the Netherlands', in Hartmut Lehmann, ed., *Säkularisierung, Dechristianisierung und Rechristianisierung im neuzeitlichen Europa*, Göttingen 1997, pp. 131-153.

⁴⁵ Tiele, 'Over de wetten', p. 244.

‘unknowing mob’ the right to vote⁴⁶ – is as dangerous for religious development as the absolute sovereignty of one leader or an oligarchy. A ‘real aristocracy’ – ‘the natural, lawful rule of the best people, regardless of rank and class’ – is the ideal for which Tiele strove.⁴⁷

The *special laws* of development are the Law of Reformation, the Law of Survival and Revival, and the Law of Advancement by Reaction. Development was viewed by Tiele as a gradual, and primarily ‘natural,’ process. Artificial reformations, which do not tie in with existing traditions and forces, will not last. It makes no sense to change the outer forms. Instead, fruitful development has to begin with the improvement of religious consciousness. The second special law, which according to Tiele may be called Tylor’s law, explains that older ideas and customs may ‘survive’ in lower circles of society and may be revived at the moment when a higher stage of religion becomes weaker. Apparitions of the Virgin Mary, simple miracles and spiritist seances are examples given by Tiele. The third law formulates the notion that some developments are reactions against earlier, one-sided forms of religion. This does not mean that there was no grain of truth in the older forms. If one realizes this and does not consider one’s own position to be absolute, a true tolerance is possible, which values diversity as conducive to progress.⁴⁸

The last section deals with the *general law* of development, which essentially maintains the thesis that the highest developed religion and therewith the principle of rationality and morality in religion always triumphs over lower forms of religion, even if the former is temporarily rejected in some special cases.⁴⁹ The highest form of religion also maintains a balance between the ethical and the religious element. Christianity has not yet reached this final balance, but if it develops into the spiritual worship of God as the Father of all people, which reveals itself in the form of the compassionate love of fellow human beings, then at that time it will be, by forming the ‘foundation of true, complete humanity’, the religion of the whole of mankind.⁵⁰ With this, we have reached Tiele’s final verdict on the laws of religious development.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 247.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 248.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 258f. Tiele referred here to Samuel Johnson, *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion*, 2 vols, London 1879, vol. I, p. 18f.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 262.

III. Development and Classification (The Gifford Lectures)

The importance of the idea of development for Tiele has already been recognized. In his obituary of Tiele, Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848-1920) stated that it was the core idea of his entire science of religion.⁵¹ More recently, Tiele's Gifford Lectures, *Elements of the Science of Religion*, were labelled the 'clearest and most adamant post-Darwinian use and defence of the concept of development'.⁵² Indeed, the first part of the Gifford Lectures, the so called morphology of religion, can be considered as Tiele's major discussion on the topic. Here, he dealt with the *morphai* (the 'ever-changing' elements of religion), whereas the second ('ontological') part of the Gifford Lectures investigated the 'true being or essence of religion'.⁵³ In the eighth lecture of the first series Tiele briefly looked back on his earlier work, especially on the article about the laws of development of 1874, which was discussed above.

Much of what I then wrote I should now formulate otherwise, and I have indeed several times modified my university lectures on the subject accordingly. And I must now admit that the title of the article was not quite accurate. I should not have said 'Laws of the Development of Religion', but 'Laws of Development in their Application to Religion'. For in point of fact I only meant even then to maintain that the laws which govern the development of the human mind hold true of religion also, though their application may differ in form and in details. But I still adhere to the article as a whole, and have not altered my opinion in point of principle. If such laws – or call them the rules, forms, necessary conditions, if you will, by which spiritual development is bound – did not exist, and if we were unable to form some idea of them corresponding with reality, it would be better to give up the science of religion altogether as a fond illusion. We should not even be entitled to speak

Comment [JCH3]: For?

⁵¹ P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, 'Cornelis Petrus Tiele', in *Jaarboek van de Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen* (1902) 125-154; reprinted in id., *Portretten en Kritieken*, Haarlem 1909, pp. 82-120, at p. 116.

⁵² Tim Murphy, 'The Concept "Entwicklung" in German *Religionswissenschaft*: Before and After Darwin', in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999) 8-23, p. 15. Without any noticeable hesitation Murphy includes the Dutchman Tiele in the 'German schools of *Religionswissenschaft*', which employ an 'inherently anti-empiricist and anti-materialist' concept of development.

⁵³ Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion*, 2 vols, Edinburgh – London, 1897-1899, vol. II, p. 188.

of development at all, for this idea necessarily involves that of rules and laws.⁵⁴

This quotation indicates both how important and, at the same time, how difficult the concepts of development and laws are.

In the following I will highlight how the idea of development functions in the first series of the Gifford Lectures. In my analysis I will also make use of the influential article ‘*Religions*’, which Tiele wrote for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1886), and the short manual of his philosophy of religion *Outlines of the Science of Religion* (1901), which presents the views, so eloquently stated in the Gifford Lectures, in a much briefer compass.⁵⁵ Firstly, I will consider the actual concept of religious development in more depth (a); secondly, the basic dichotomy between nature and ethical religions will be discussed (b); and finally, Tiele’s idea of the laws of development will be addressed (c).

(a) According to Tiele, the metaphor of *development* is borrowed from natural history, and is only applied by analogy to the spiritual life of man.

Development is growth. From the green bud the flower bursts forth as from its sheath, and reveals the wealth and brilliance of its colours. From the tiny acorn springs up the mighty oak in all its majesty.⁵⁶

The examples given all point to organic growth: things develop out of germs that potentially contain the later phases of development. If one destroys one thing and puts another in its place, this is not called development. Tiele mentioned two implications, firstly, that the object undergoing development is a unity, and, secondly:

. . . that each phase of the evolution has its value, importance, and right of existence, and that it is necessary to give birth to a higher phase, and continues to act in that higher phase.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 214.

⁵⁵ Tiele, ‘Religions’, in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (9th edition), vol. 20, Edinburgh 1886, pp. 358-371; Tiele, *Hoofdtrekken der Godsdienstwetenschap*, Amsterdam 1901.

⁵⁶ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Instead of giving his own definition, Tiele quoted ‘an American scholar’, who characterized development as follows: ‘a continuous progressive change according to certain laws and by means of resident forces’.⁵⁸ One would like to have had a somewhat more precise definition.

Instead, Tiele specified the type of history he had in mind, which is expounded in such statements as religions die, but religion itself does not. Ultimately, he was not interested in local or temporal religious developments but in the development of religion in mankind. ‘Its development may be described as the evolution of the religious idea in history, or better as the progress of the religious man, or of mankind as religious by nature’.⁵⁹ As the core of religion, according to Tiele, lies in the inner disposition towards God, outer forms change due to inner change. In several senses of the word this is an ‘idealist’ view of religious development. In all the changes and vicissitudes, Tiele discerned:

. . . not a puzzling, but a grand and instructive spectacle – the labour of the human spirit to find fitter and fuller expression for the religious idea as it becomes ever clearer, and for religious needs as they become ever loftier – not the mere fickle play of human caprice, but, to use the language of faith, the eternal working of the divine Spirit.⁶⁰

In this way, the history of religion is given a teleological perspective, which accords perfectly with Tiele’s liberal Protestantism.

(b) After this exposition of the concept of development, Tiele treated the *stages* of development. Three lectures, discussing the ‘lowest nature-religions’, the ‘highest nature-religions’ and the ‘ethical religions’ successively, are concerned with this subject. I will not summarize these chapters, but highlight the basic dichotomy between *nature and ethical religions* which underlies Tiele’s treatment. Firstly, however, it has to be stressed again that in this view historical research involves a classification of religions. Thus, Tiele spent much time finding an adequate categorization. He started by pointing to the fact that the old classifications by

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 38. In the Dutch edition the passage between dashes (*liggende streepjes*) is emphasized; cf. Tiele, *Inleiding tot de godsdienstwetenschap* (1897-1899), 2 vols, second [slightly] revised edition, Amsterdam 1900, vol. I, p. 37.

scholars such as Hegel are no longer of any use, because they were based on insufficient data.⁶¹ In his contribution to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Tiele gave Max Müller some credit, but criticized Müller's view that the classification of religions runs parallel to that of languages: '[T]he farther history advances the more does religion become independent of both language and nationality'.⁶²

Although the difference between nature and ethical religions is one of principle, the transition from the former to the latter cannot be described in terms of a rift. However, it is not a smooth, uncomplicated development either. On the one hand, the element of continuity is emphasized: for instance, ethical attributes can also be ascribed to the gods at the level of nature religions, but in these cases the 'ethical personifications are simply incorporated in the old system, and not only not distinguished from the nature gods, but even subordinated to them'.⁶³ On the other hand, the transition from the higher nature religions to ethical forms of religions apparently implies a discontinuity: it 'is invariably accomplished by means of a designated reformation, or sometimes even by a revolution'.⁶⁴ The opposition is described in various ways. Whereas nature religions tend to polytheism, ethical religions tend to monotheism. Ethical religions do not depend on the common belief in national traditions but on the belief in a doctrine of salvation, and are founded by individuals or in some cases by a body of priests or teachers. The opposition is sketched by Tiele in a multifaceted way, which I have only roughly outlined here. He did not stop at this point but discussed the various 'subdivisions of each of the two principal categories' in some detail.⁶⁵

I will not go into the various ramifications and stages within the history of nature religions, but turn to Tiele's discussion of ethical religions. He started with a

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 58.

⁶² Tiele, 'Religions', p. 365.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 366.

⁶⁴ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 121.

⁶⁵ Tiele, 'Religions', p. 366f., where he made the following adjustment: 'The different stages of development have been characterized by C.P. Tiele (*Outlines of the History of Religion*, § 3) as follows: - (a) a period in which animism generally prevailed, still represented by the so-called nature religions (in the narrower sense), or rather by the polydaemonistic magical tribal religions; (b) polytheistic national religions resting on a traditional doctrine; (c) nomistic ... religions, or religious communities founded on a law or sacred writing and subduing polytheism more or less completely by pantheism or monotheism; (d) universal or world-religions, which start from principles and maxims. Though in general maintaining this division, at least for practical use, if we wish to draw up a morphological classification of religions, we shall have to modify and complete it, and to arrange the different stages under the two principal categories of nature religions and ethical religions'. For a summary see Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago – London 1998, pp. 269-284, at p. 268f.

question which had already been raised by Abraham Kuenen in his Hibbert Lectures:⁶⁶

What right have we to divide them into nomistic or nomothetic communities, founded on a law or Holy Scripture, and universal or world religions, which start from principles and maxims, the latter being only three – Buddhism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism?⁶⁷

Although the category ‘world religions’ may have some practical use (‘to distinguish the three religions which have found their way to different races and peoples and all of which profess the intention to conquer the world’), Tiele preferred to drop the term, which he had used himself many times in his earlier work.⁶⁸ This is not to say that there is no difference between these three religions, on the one hand, and ‘Confucianism, Brahmanism, Jainism, Mazdaism, and Judaism on the other’.⁶⁹ Tiele made an attempt to distinguish the two categories as follows: particularistic versus universalistic (not universal); national versus human; and those bound to special doctrines and rites, versus others which, although equally embodied in doctrines and rites, are ‘nevertheless really free from them’, as they start from principles and maxims.⁷⁰

This does not mean that the three universalistic religious communities are on the same level: ‘Both Islam and Buddhism, if not national, are only relatively universalistic, and show the one-sidedness, the one of the Semitic, the other of Aryan race’.⁷¹ Whereas Islam exalts the divine and opposes it to the human, Buddhism neglects the divine and preaches salvation through self-renunciation. Moreover,

⁶⁶ Abraham Kuenen, *National Religions and Universal Religions*, London 1882.

⁶⁷ Tiele, ‘Religions’, p. 368.

⁶⁸ An early example is Tiele, *De Godsdienst van Zarathustra*, pp. 2, 275f.; cf. Jan N. Bremmer, ‘Methodologische en terminologische notities bij de opkomst van de godsdienstgeschiedenis in de achttiende en negentiende eeuw’, in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57 (2003) 308-321, at p. 317f.; cf. Tiele, ‘Religions’, p. 367: ‘Strictly speaking, there can be no more than one universal or world religion, and if one of the existing religions is so potentially it has not yet reached its goal. This is a matter of belief which lies beyond the limits of scientific classification’.

⁶⁹ Tiele, ‘Religions’, p. 368.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 369; cf. Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I., p. 294: ‘In the higher ethical religions, although the law is not abrogated, and is sometimes even extended, the doctrines deemed essential are gradually summarised in several leading precepts, until, when we reach the highest stage of religious development known to us, the great all-embracing principle of Love, expressed in the two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets, is revealed as the perennial source of true religious life’.

⁷¹ Tiele, ‘Religions’, p. 369.

Buddhism is atheistic in its origin and becomes easily infested by the ‘most childish superstitions’. Evidently, Islam is worse than Buddhism – because of its ritualistic features it ‘is little better than an extended Judaism’. Buddhism comes close to Christianity because its worship is not ‘necessarily bound to place or time’. However, because of its capacity to adapt itself to ever new circumstances, ‘which is the natural result of its purely spiritual character, Christianity ranks incommensurably high above both its rivals’.⁷² Tiele added a footnote to stress that this statement is not a confession but is made from a scientific point of view. In the Gifford Lectures he argued that these religions were called ‘ethical’:

... because, arising out of an ethical awakening, they aim at a more or less lofty ethical ideal, an ideal no longer merely co-ordinated with religion, but conceived as God’s own will, and an emanation of His being – or in more abstract philosophical language, an ideal objectivised in, and projected into the conception of God.⁷³

Whereas Tiele subscribed wholeheartedly to the differentiation thesis (in the course of history religion becomes a more and more autonomous phenomenon), this did not imply that religion and the ethical element were to be separated from each other. The universalistic tendency of the ‘ethical religions’ implied an inclusiveness: all fellow human beings were to be included in the ultimate religion, which should evolve out of – liberal Protestant – Christianity.

(c) In the first series of the Gifford Lectures, Tiele readjusted his views concerning the *laws* of religious development. Firstly, he rejected the idea of special laws of *religious* development; secondly, he clearly distinguished the (general) ‘laws which govern the development of the human mind’ from the laws of natural science,⁷⁴ and, thirdly, he clarified which ‘laws’ were actually basic to religious development. It remains difficult to specify exactly Tiele’s view in this matter, as we find different laws of development in his last book *Outlines of the Science of Religion*, which appeared only a couple of years after the Gifford Lectures. To a large extent, the

⁷² Ibid., p. 369. Tiele referred here to the work of the German liberal theologian Richard Rothe (1799-1867), who had put much emphasis on the flexibility of the Christian religion.

⁷³ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 120f.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 214-219, esp. p. 218: ‘Let us admit ... that we cannot determine by fixed laws what must happen, because it does not only depend solely on conditions that we can ascertain, but also on the incalculable element of individuality, of the personal free-will of each individual’.

difference can be seen as a difference of expression, stating more or less the same insights, but nevertheless, it was apparently not easy for Tiele to settle the whole issue in an unambiguous way.

In the *eighth* chapter of the Gifford Lectures, Tiele formulated two laws: (1) the Law of the Unity of the Human Mind (essentially the same law as stated in his article of 1874 discussed above)⁷⁵, and (2) the Law of Intellectual Intercourse, which runs as follows:

All development, apart from the natural capabilities of men and peoples, results from the stimulus given to self-consciousness by contact with a different stage of development, whether higher or lower.⁷⁶

If we apply this general law to religion, two ‘practical rules’ follow from it: (1) ‘The religion that will attain the highest development is that which is most alive to the genuinely religious elements in other forms’, and (2) ‘Religious development is best promoted by the free intercourse of its most diverse manifestations’.⁷⁷ This conforms perfectly, of course, to the idea of growth by assimilation, both in cultural and religious ways: ‘religion assimilates whatever is good and true in general culture; and each form of religion assimilates whatever is true and good in other forms’.⁷⁸ The first law finds its foundation in the unity of the human mind, the second in the unity of the human species. Both laws can be seen as expressions of the ‘great Law of Assimilation’, which is the most important factor of development.⁷⁹

The *ninth* chapter of the Gifford Lectures addresses the issue of the ‘influence of the individual in the development of religion’.⁸⁰ This influence should not be underrated in Tiele’s view, as ‘all progress, reform, discovery, invention, must have originated in the brain of a single individual’.⁸¹ ‘Religion develops through the

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 232; cf. Tiele, ‘Over de wetten der ontwikkeling van den godsdienst’ and Tiele, *Hoofdtrekken*, p. 47f.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 239; cf. Tiele, *Hoofdtrekken*, pp. 48-50.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 239f.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 242.

⁷⁹ Tiele, *Inleiding tot de Godsdienstwetenschap*, vol. I, p. 220. This remark is an addition Tiele made in the revised, second Dutch edition, and is, therefore, not found in the English edition of the Gifford Lectures; cf. Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 242. Tiele did not elaborate on this ‘great law’.

⁸⁰ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 244.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 246.

medium of persons'.⁸² Because so much depends on the creativity of individuals, there is an element which cannot be explained in (religious) development.⁸³ Interestingly enough, in this chapter which focuses on the role of the individual, and thus points to the inexplicable element in history, Tiele also elaborated on the continuity of human history in general and religious history in particular, which leads to the formulation of the 'great law of *the continuity of religious development*'.⁸⁴ Whether or not this is actually a law in any precise sense of the word, it is fundamental for Tiele's understanding of development. Even in periods of apparent decay, 'there arise mighty spirits from whom emanates a new revelation of religious life, a higher than the preceding, yet rooted in it'.⁸⁵ Development must not be seen as the 'supersession of the old by something new, something different', but as 'growth from a germ, in which lies latent everything that later springs from it'.⁸⁶

Besides the laws of the unity of the human mind, of human intercourse, and of progressive development, in his *Outlines* (1901) Tiele also listed the Law of Balance or Synthesis, which we already encountered in the article of 1874. Applied to religion, it means that there has to be a balance between authority and tradition, on the one hand, and freedom of individual consciousness, on the other.⁸⁷ In the Gifford Lectures Tiele was less outspoken. He more or less rejected the law of self-recovery by reaction, stressed the need for an equilibrium between various *directions* of development,⁸⁸ and concluded by saying: 'If . . . there be any such law at all, we prefer to call it the law of progress by synthesis or reconciliation. But we shall see afterwards that it is only one phase, a single manifestation, of the main law that governs all development, including that of religion'.⁸⁹

This main law is addressed in the *tenth* and last chapter of the first series of the Gifford Lectures about the essentials of the development of religion. Ultimately it is a twofold process: 'ever-increasing differentiation, coupled with efforts for

⁸² Ibid., p. 271.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 258.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 271 (emphasis in the original); cf. Tiele, *Hoofdtrekken*, pp. 50-52.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 268.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 272.

⁸⁷ Cf. Tiele, *Hoofdtrekken*, pp. 52-54.

⁸⁸ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 151: 'By the term direction I understand a spiritual current which sweeps along a single principle of religion, or some fundamental religious idea, more or less regardless of others, to its extreme consequences'.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 205.

reconciliation and unity'.⁹⁰ I will give a somewhat longer quotation to show how Tiele saw this as an interrelated process:

From an originally somewhat motley and chaotic, yet monotonous, multiplicity of forms, several more developed groups gradually detach themselves, formed by the confluence of a number of hitherto distinct modes of worship. This is the genesis of a certain unification, and the beginning of differentiation at the same time, because new and more pronounced varieties constantly arise. And so the process goes on: union and partition, the formation of great unities which again break up into new varieties, until new combinations are again effected. Yet the general tendency of religious development indicates ever-diminishing particularism, ever-increasing universalism, and an aspiration, whether conscious or not, for true catholicity.⁹¹

The dialectic between differentiation and unification is to be read within a teleological framework. The articulation of different forms does not preclude a tendency to unification and simplification, as it is also called, by which Tiele meant that religions are 'reduced to a fixed system, to a few cardinal points, and at last to a single fundamental principle'.⁹²

Tiele pointed to a similar dialectic regarding the relationship between religions and other cultural domains. On the one hand, religion

. . . conquers a province of its own, and in that province attains ever greater independence . . . but not in the sense of being indifferent to the influence of advancing civilisation and the development of art, science, morality, and society.⁹³

According to the law of the unity of the human mind, the ever-growing independence of the religious sphere does not preclude efforts 'to reconcile religion with the

⁹⁰ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 295.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 294. By this principle is meant, no doubt, the Christian principle of love.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

interests of science and art, of philosophy and morality, of society and the State'.⁹⁴ Ultimately, the development of religion was related by Tiele to a progress of self-consciousness. Man 'becomes ever more clearly conscious of what he is and what he requires as a religious being, and of the nature and the demands of the religion within him'.⁹⁵ The engine, so to speak, of religious development is the growth of (religious) self-consciousness, which is not to be equated with a plea for a purely spiritual religion. Religion was located by Tiele primarily in the inwardness of human beings, in the inner relationship between man and God which is the main topic of the second series of the Gifford Lectures, where 'we shall . . . endeavour to form an idea, not merely of the development of, but of the essential and permanent elements in religion, and thus ascend to its true and ultimate source'.⁹⁶

IV. Conclusion

On various occasions Tiele noted that without the concepts of development and the laws of development there would be no science of religion in the proper sense of the word. In his paper for *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Chicago, 1893), he proclaimed:

What should be done first of all is to trace religion in the course of its development, that is to say, in its life, to inquire what every family of religions, as for instance the Aryan and the Semitic, what every particular religion, what the great religious persons have contributed to this development, to what laws and conditions this development is subjected and in what it really consists.⁹⁷

This objective is to be achieved in the morphological part of Tiele's work, as exemplified by the first series of the Gifford Lectures. The assumptions involved in this programme were mentioned by Tiele himself: the idea of the unity of the human

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 298.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 299f.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 302.

⁹⁷ Tiele, 'On the Study of Comparative Theology', in John Henry Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 2 vols, London 1893, vol. I, pp. 583-590, at p. 589.

and the human species, the idea of continuity and progress, and the comparative method which brings non-simultaneous phenomena into line.⁹⁸

History and comparison go hand in hand: '[L]ike every genuine scientific study, historical investigations, if they are to bear fruit, must be comparative'. Thus, we may determine the similarities and the differences between religious phenomena and religions as such.⁹⁹ The introduction of the comparative method into the history of religions is one way to explain the fact that these early practitioners saw the study of religion as a 'science', based on induction and sound reasoning. Here we should note that Tiele himself was attacked for his allegedly speculative way of construing a developmental history of religion. It is not the genealogy of religions, which traced actual dependencies, but the morphology, which met criticism. Tiele's ultimate goal was to outline the development of religion in mankind: 'the progress of the religious man, or of mankind as religious by nature'.¹⁰⁰ In the various religious manifestations, he looked for an ever-increasing – one could almost say – purification of religion, which gets ever more interiorized, spiritual and ethical. At the same time he also detected a movement which synthesizes the two main directions in religious history, the 'theanthropic' and the 'theocratic'. The former is dominant in Aryan religions and conceives of the deity as immanent in man; the latter is dominant in Semitic religions and sees god as a ruler outside man.¹⁰¹ The two elements are brought together as follows:

In adoration are united those two phases of religion which are termed by the schools 'transcendent' and 'immanent' respectively, or which, in religious language, represent the believer as 'looking up to God as the Most High', and as 'feeling himself akin to God as his Father'.¹⁰²

The core of the critique concerned the combination of history and classification. History is about real developments, his opponents objected, whereas Tiele's morphology classifies different types of religion and 'presents' this classification as a developmental

⁹⁸ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 170.

⁹⁹ Tiele, 'Religions', p. 358; cf. Tiele, 'Theologie en Godsdienstwetenschap', in *De Gids* 30/2 (1866) 205-244, p. 216.

¹⁰⁰ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 32.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Kippenberg, 'Religionsentwicklung', in Hans G. Kippenberg & Martin Riesebrodt, eds. *Max Webers 'Religionssystematik'*, Tübingen 2001, pp. 77-99, esp. pp. 91-93.

¹⁰² Tiele, *Elements*, vol. II, p. 198; cf. Molendijk, 'Tiele on Religion'.

history. In the preface of the *Outlines of the History of Religion*, Tiele thanked his ‘friend and colleague Dr H. Kern, who knows all, or nearly all, about ancient India, and who made such a profound study of German mythology’, for his kind review of the Dutch edition which had appeared a year earlier. However, Tiele did not address the criticism that Kern had made: that every classification will collide to some extent with historiography.¹⁰³ Even Tiele’s close colleagues had difficulties with this type of ‘history’, as he was well aware:

My old friend and colleague, the late Professor Acquoy, an authority of the highest rank among the historians of Christianity, could not speak without a smile of what he called, with a kind of ironical respect, the higher kinds of historical writing, and particularly of what he termed nomological hierography. No serious historian need trouble himself with the question whether there is a law in accordance to which history grows. ‘Let the philosopher study this question *if he pleases*’. Well, we do please to examine the question . . .¹⁰⁴

Tiele was not thrown off balance by such remarks, and proceeded along his own path.

P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye was also rather sceptical about Tiele’s laws of religious development. In his obituary, he cited the above-mentioned Acquoy, who had written in his manual of church history that no historical law had been discovered so far, and that such laws probably lie outside the scope of the human mind, in which case it was improbable that any human being will ever discover them.¹⁰⁵ The irony is evident. In the introduction to the first edition of his famous handbook, Chantepie de la Saussaye pointed to the complexities surrounding the concept of religious development, and in the second edition he dropped the idea of a developmental history of religion (in the singular) altogether.¹⁰⁶ W.B. Kristensen (1867-1953) was critical of evolutionism,¹⁰⁷ as was his pupil Gerardus van der Leeuw. In his contribution on this topic to the second edition of the German authoritative

¹⁰³ Tiele, *Outlines of the History of Religion* (1877), p. xi; H. Kern, Review of Tiele, *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst* (1876), in *De Gids* 41/2 (1877) 365-372.

¹⁰⁴ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 215 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁵ P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, ‘Cornelis Petrus Tiele’, p. 118; cf. J.G.R. Acquoy, *Handleiding tot de kerkgeschiedvorsching en kerkgeschiedschrijving*, ’s-Gravenhage 1894, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 2 vols, Freiburg i.B., J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1887-1889; second edition, 1897, vol. II, p. vi: ‘Das Buch bringt Geschichte der Religionen, keine Entwicklungsgeschichte der Religion’.

¹⁰⁷ Kristensen, *Inleiding tot de godsdienstgeschiedenis*, Arnhem 1955, p. 23.

encyclopaedia *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Van der Leeuw rejected the idea of religious progress because it did not comply with the unique and absolute character of religious experience.¹⁰⁸ Phenomenology of religion, as it slowly emerged on Dutch soil at the beginning of the twentieth century and culminated in Van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1933), had great difficulties with the idea of progressive religious development, and the idea slowly faded away in Dutch studies of the science of religion, as it did in cultural anthropology.¹⁰⁹ Contrary to Eric Sharpe's suggestion, evolutionism was not dominant in Dutch religious studies throughout the years between the wars.¹¹⁰

After the paradigm of development was abandoned it was hard to see how it could have been so influential. As Evans-Pritchard said in his 1950 Marett Lecture: 'It will readily be seen how a combination of the notion of scientific law and that of progress leads in anthropology, as in the philosophy of history, to procrustean stages, the presumed inevitability of which gives them a normative character'.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the idea of development had been the basis of a major current in cultural research. It functioned as a paradigm, as is evident from the fact that Tiele stuck to it (almost unreflectively) in the face of strong criticism from colleagues, who insisted on doing 'real history'. It was evident to him that the only way to relate all the different religions to each other was to place them in a scheme of development. Otherwise there would be no science of religion but only history of religions. To simply create a classification with Christianity at the top would be unscientific and unhistorical. From Tiele's point of view, the various types of religion arise in history and develop (seen from a morphological point of view) out of each other, and thus, the variations can be understood in a historical way. Therefore, classification and history are not incompatible but are inextricably bound up with each other.

Ultimately it is Tiele's concept of history which makes it hard for present-day scholars to understand him. The problem is not so much the notion of the

¹⁰⁸ G. van der Leeuw, 'Religion III: Religionsgeschichtliche Entwicklung', in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, second edition, vol. IV, Tübingen 1930, col. 1875-1877.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Molendijk, 'At the Cross-Roads. Early Dutch Science of Religion in International Perspective', in Sigurd Hjelde, ed., *Man, Meaning, & History. Hundred Years of History of Religions in Norway. The Heritage of W. Brede Kristensen*, Leiden 2000, pp. 19-56; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 287 and passim.

¹¹⁰ Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, p. 27, note 1.

¹¹¹ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Social Anthropology. Past and Present' (1950), in id., *Essays in Social Anthropology*, London 1962, pp. 13-28, at p.17.

Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen or ‘the idea that in the absence of historical evidence, the earlier phases could be reconstructed by using data derived from the observation of peoples still living in earlier “stages” of development’,¹¹² but the teleological view of history. Walter Benjamin tells the famous story of the angel of history who would have liked to stay and mourn the losses but is driven into the future by a storm coming from Paradise. As he turns his back to the future, the angel sees ‘*eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft*’. This storm, which we call progress, leaves behind a pile of debris mounting to the sky.¹¹³ Tiele’s ‘observant spectator’, however, saw something completely different: beneath change and kaleidoscopic variety he detected constant progress:

Human society and culture, as a whole, do not only assume new forms, but are continually growing; and these new forms are on the whole richer, ampler, purer and higher than those they supersede.¹¹⁴

Summary

This essay explores C.P. Tiele’s fundamental notion of religious development and, in a certain respect, it complements my earlier paper on his concept of religion, which he ultimately locates ‘in the innermost depths of our souls’ (*Numen* 46/1999). The present article argues that the mere possibility of an interrelated, comparative study of religions (in the plural) is founded on the idea of a developmental history of religion (in the singular). To Tiele, this history testifies to the fact that the changing and transient forms of religion are ultimately inadequate expressions of the infinite in us. Thus, his ‘science’ ties in perfectly with his liberal Protestantism. I start with some remarks on the use of the concept of religious development in the nineteenth century, then I outline Tiele’s basic assumptions (with special reference to his 1874 article on the laws of development), and, finally, I scrutinize the first series of the Gifford Lectures (1896-1898), which epitomize his later views on religious development. It is shown that developmental thinking in early Dutch science of religion did not originate

¹¹² Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 15.

¹¹³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften*, Frankfurt a.M. (Suhrkamp) 1977, p. 255.

¹¹⁴ Tiele, *Elements*, vol. I, p. 263.

primarily in Darwinian thought but in German idealism. Moreover, one has to keep in mind that Tiele's developmental views met severe criticism among his successors. For instance, Gerardus van der Leeuw rejected the whole idea of religious progress because it did not comply with the unique and absolute character of religious experience. Thus, contrary to Eric Sharpe's suggestion, evolutionism was not dominant in Dutch religious studies throughout the period between the wars.